

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION

December 28, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Brent Scowcroft *BS*
SUBJECT: CIA Assessment -- Future of Soviet Commitment
in Angola

The Director of Central Intelligence has sent you (at Tab A) an Agency assessment focussed specifically on how determined the Soviet Union will be to support the MPLA in various Angolan contingencies in the near term.

MORI/CDF per C03213723

Principal points are:

-- Moscow at present is willing to go a significant distance in support of the MPLA.

-- Moscow does not yet see Soviet involvement in Angola as a real threat to detente.

-- At the same time, consensus within the Kremlin for the current Angolan policy is not deep.

-- The Soviets have probably not yet made up their minds on whether to increase support for the MPLA or move toward a political compromise if the Angolan conflict begins to settle into a prolonged and indecisive stalemate.

The following paragraphs summarize the Agency analysis.

Background

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

-- Moscow's performance in Angola over the past several months bespeaks a rather tough and unyielding cast of mind regarding its support for the MPLA. Moscow seems to be saying, both on the ground in Angola and in its public utterances, that it is willing to go a significant distance to support an MPLA victory.

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-2-

-- Moscow is also saying that appeals to the idea of detente will not deter the Soviet Union from pursuing what it regards as its legitimate role as a world power.

-- In their present frame of mind, the Soviets are unresponsive to arguments that their actions in Angola will unduly complicate their broader relations with the US. The detente atmosphere was palpably soured over trade, emigration and SALT II before Angola became a political issue between the two countries. The Soviets are skeptical that Washington will step back from a SALT agreement or will refuse to market its surplus grain in the Soviet Union because of Angola.

-- This kind of analysis would commend itself to Brezhnev because he has strong domestic political reasons for pursuing a tough line now on Angola. It is a place where he can demonstrate that detente not only creates opportunities for "social progress," but also does not inhibit the Soviet Union from taking advantage of them.

The Near Future

-- The factors which have contributed to Moscow's Angola policy could change in significant ways over the next few months.

-- If Brezhnev gets through the Party Congress in good shape, politically as well as physically, he may feel under less pressure to show that he is willing and able to stand up to the Americans in Angola. The pain associated with the setbacks in agriculture and the economic retrenchment may become less evident. The Soviets may therefore feel somewhat less defensive and less compelled to demonstrate that they are dealing from a position of strength.

-- Any progress on bilateral issues such as SALT would tend to refocus attention on the detente relationship and relegate, in the eyes of the world as well as the leaders in Moscow, Angola to the wings. This would then make it easier for Moscow to cut a deal on Angola.

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-3-

-- As we move into the next year, the Soviets will also be paying more attention to the impact of their actions on US politics. They may wish to show some restraint in the interest of not poisoning the atmosphere during the elections.

Conclusion

-- Whether the Soviets demonstrate "restraint" will depend greatly on the situation on the ground in Angola. At one end of the spectrum, the Soviets are unlikely to show much restraint if there is a serious threat to the continued existence of the MPLA. Moscow cannot afford another highly visible defeat. If this contingency threatened, the Soviets could be expected to send in more arms, more Cubans, and more of their own advisors, together with a token show of naval force in the area.

-- At the other end of the spectrum, Angola does not yet figure so prominently in Soviet priorities that Moscow feels a strong imperative for an early and decisive victory there. But Moscow is not likely to apply significant pressure on the MPLA or the Cubans to refrain from significantly strengthening their territorial position, or routing the opposition if that seems possible with the forces and material at hand or in the pipeline.

-- This does not mean that the MPLA has a blank check. A gradual victory in Angola, which minimized the complications on the detente front would be the ideal outcome for Moscow. If the Soviets judged that events were moving in this fashion, they would probably resist pressures from their clients to support a course aimed at a dramatic early victory.

-- If the conflict seemed to settle into a prolonged and indecisive stalemate, strong MPLA pressures would arise for an increase in aid. But the situation would also probably lead other Africans to argue more strongly for a political compromise. The Soviets probably have not yet made up their minds about how to handle this possibility. If it confronted them, the state of their relations with the US in general would be a factor in their reaction and would probably lead them to accept some compromise solution rather than holding out and pressing for a total MPLA "victory." If they had to make such a decision now, however, they would likely opt for raising their Angolan stake, in the belief that the US is not likely to take effective preventive action.

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